



15th Annual
FAMILY LEARNING WEEKEND for
FAMILIES OF Blind and Visually Impaired Children
June 19-21, 2015

What: MSDB 15th Annual Family Learning Weekend for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Where: MSDB Campus in Great Falls
When: June 19-21, 2015
Who: Families of Blind and Visually Impaired Children living in Montana!!!!!!
Why: It will be fun!!

The Learning Weekend is a creative program that provides opportunities for families of sensory impaired children to learn about blindness and visual impairment, share their experiences with other families, and learn how to communicate more fully with one another in a warm, caring atmosphere.

The focus of the weekend is to enhance each individual's personal knowledge of blindness and how it relates to the education and development of their child. Informal workshops, group discussions (parent groups, kids groups, siblings groups, etc.) and hands-on activities will be offered. Child care and recreation for the children (siblings included) is available at no charge. Families will be reimbursed for mileage at the current state rate.

Housing is provided on a first come first serve basis. Each family is generally provided with their own suite of rooms in the cottages and efforts are made to make assignments according to individual needs and preferences. Typically each family has their own bathroom, sometimes two depending on the size of the family. **Participants will need to bring personal items such as soap, shampoo and toothpaste, and make sure you bring your swimsuit!**

Children ages **birth to two** will be in the cottage nursery with staff. *Parents should pick up their children from the nursery prior to lunch and return them to the same location when they are done eating.*

The children are divided into groups based mostly on age. Many factors are taken into consideration including friendships, maturity level and interests when putting together the groups. The children stay with their groups until they join the parents for mealtimes. Some of MSDB finest residential and school staff will be responsible for supervising your children and making sure they enjoy the weekend as much as you do!

Children ages **three to five** will be involved in a variety of activities throughout the day. These activities will include: snacks, indoor and outdoor activities including a trip to the MSDB playground (weather permitting). Swimming (in the Mustang Center in the afternoon) will be available for this age group from 4:30–5:30 with their parents. The activities for this group will remain flexible depending on the ages and abilities of the participants. Saturday morning during breakfast your children ages **six through eighteen** will be assigned to various teams (groups). These teams are designed to allow for children to be involved with peers their own age. For this session there will be several different activities including: recreation activities, crafts, some Orientation and Mobility experiences and of course snacks. Sometime during the morning session Yvette Smail, (MSDB Behavior Specialist) will also meet with the siblings and provide them the opportunity to discuss their feelings regarding having a blind or visually impaired sibling. *This information (in general terms, while keeping siblings names confidential) will be shared with the parents during the Sunday morning presentation.*

Information from various vendors (serving Blind and Visually Impaired) will be available during the weekend

***The kids program is intended to provide entertainment and educational activities that will further the participants understanding of vision loss and its impact on the family. Activities are designed for the youth with vision loss and their siblings. Participants are grouped by age and staff are assigned accordingly depending on the numbers of the participants and their individual needs. If you have unique concerns regarding your child, please let us know and we will work with you to insure that everyone has a good time.

Presenter Bios

Barb Balko is an Outreach Consultant for MSDB in Western Montana working with blind and visually impaired children for the past 18 years. She is a certified teacher of the visually impaired, orientation and mobility specialist and deafblind specialist. Barb has a daughter (Katie) who is blind and is now 31 years old. She and her daughter reside in Missoula. Barb loves and is committed to helping other parents embrace their role in raising their child with vision challenges.

Pamela Boespflug is an Outreach Vision Consultant for MSDB enjoying the traveling along the Hi-Line in eastern Montana, the Helena area and all the awesome people she serves. With husband Dale she spends time with their four grandkids whenever possible. She treasures her 42 years of challenges and successes in the field of education most in the field of vision loss.

Steve Fugate is in his seventh year as a vision consultant for MSDB. He recently retired from the Navy Reserves. He has been working in the Billings public schools since 1994. He has a BA from Idaho State University, a MS from MSU-Billings and a MA from Stephen F. Austin State University.

Jane Garrison is a Vision Outreach Consultant for MSDB serving students in the northwest portion of the state of Montana for 7 years. Her home and office are located in Eureka. Jane was a special education teacher for 18 years before coming to work for MSDB in August of 2008. Jane has a Bachelor of Science degree from Northern Michigan University with teaching endorsements in Elementary and Special Education. She received a Masters Level certificate for Teacher of the Visually Impaired and completed Orientation and Mobility Training through Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, TX.

Kerri Norick is an MSDB Outreach Vision Consultant for south and south-central Montana. Kerri has a Bachelor's in Elementary Education with an option in Special Education from Montana State University & the University of Great Falls. After teaching for 6 years in Great Falls, Hamilton and Belgrade, MT, Kerri achieved her Masters in Special Education with an emphasis in Teacher of the Visually Impaired from Stephen F. Austin State University. She is a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist in the Bozeman area. Kerri lives with her husband, Storm, and two sons in Bozeman.

Kayla Reed went blind at the age of four from an allergic reaction to Amoxicillin. She grew up in Helena Montana and attended Carroll College for the first three years of her undergraduate Psychology degree. She then transferred to California Lutheran University in Thousand Oaks California where she completed a Bachelor's degree in Psychology as well as a Master's degree in Counseling Psychology with an emphasis in Marriage and Family Therapy. Additionally, she is employed by Guide Dogs for the Blind as an alumni Representative, which happens to supplement her joy for travelling, as she provides presentations and workshops on working with a guide dog. Most of all, she values her role as a mother to her son Grady who was born in April 2015. (space limitations reduced bio)

Corey Reed lost his sight and his right leg below the knee in a high-speed car accident in 2005 at the age of 22. His introduction into the world of adaptive sports after his accident has allowed him to thrive and has redefined what is possible not only for him but other adaptive athletes. After injuring his shoulder snowboarding while training for a spot on the US Para-snowboarding team, he decided to challenge himself in the realm of competitive fitness instead. In October 2012, Corey Reed set a world record in CrossFit by becoming the first blind/amputee to compete in one of the largest able-bodied CrossFit competitions. Corey also co-founded Ride With Core, which is a lifestyle brand that encourages individuals to become the best versions of themselves. Under his lifestyle brand, Corey offers a motivational message through his speaking engagements, produces documentary films, mentors other adaptive athletes, and provides tools and resources related to all things health and performance.

Tabitha Soliz recently joined the MSDB family as a teacher in the Visually Impaired department. She grew up in Burlington, Vermont and graduated from the University of Vermont with a degree in early childhood education and is nearing completion of a course in Teaching the Visually Impaired through the University of Massachusetts. Her interests are reading, English, Braille, crocheting and taking walks with her guide dog.

Amy Wicks began her teaching career in 1988, teaching students with a criminal background on a wagon train that moved from Mexico to Canada and back. From there Amy taught English and Journalism for several years. When her oldest daughter was diagnosed with a bilateral profound hearing loss, the family moved to Great Falls so she could attend MSDB to ensure the best possible education. Amy began teaching in the VI Dept – teaching technology, Reading, and Life Skills. Amy taught VI children for 7 years. She then returned to public school, and earned a Master's Degree in Educational Technology and Assistive Technology. Amy returned to work for MSDB as a VI Outreach Consultant in July of 2013, and is excited to be working with students with visual impairments, their families, and school staff members again. Amy plans to begin her work as a TVI in the upcoming program.

Sharon Woods is an Outreach Consultant for MSDB serving infants and students with visual impairments in south central and southeast Montana. Sharon has undergraduate degrees in education and special education with a Master's in Education in the area of teaching visually impaired birth to 21. Sharon has completed Certification in Orientation and Mobility and is a Deaf-Blind Specialist. Her passion is learning and making learning accessible to all children with blindness or visual impairments

Blind Learning Weekend 2015 Schedule

(subject to change)

Friday, June 19, 2015

- 4:00-6:00 Check in: Yellowstone Cottage
- 6:00-7:00 Dinner: Pizza, salad and dessert in the MSDB main dining room
- 7:00-9:00 All of the children will go to the Mustang Center to meet their "groups" and get to know each other.
- 7:15-8:15 *Ice Breaker:* Parents participate in an activity to connect with each other at the beginning of the weekend.
- 8:15-9:00 *Successful Teen Panel:* Opportunity for blind and visually impaired teens to share their experiences and answer any questions you may have (this is a must for the parents)
- 9:00 Pick up your kids from the Mustang Center

Saturday, June 20, 2015

- 7:45-8:45 Breakfast in the main dining room
- 8:45 *Group Picture:* All Participants together in front of the big sign (each family will get a "Memory Book" at the end of the weekend to take home)
- 9:00-12:00 *Keynote: Corey and Kayla Reed* will each share a different perspective on blindness. They will share their life experiences of losing their sight, daily experiences of jobs and college and parenting a new baby. Their life stories will include their challenges and victories, tips for parents and the pursuit of their passions. This will be followed by a time to answer your questions.
- 12:00-1:15 Lunch
- 1:15-2:15 *O & M Instructional Session and Expanded Core Session:* (sessions are repeated at 2:20) *pick one*
In one session all participants will have the opportunity for some hands on experiences under the blindfold, under the direction of the MSDB Consultants and Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists. In the other session, MSDB Consultants will discuss the Expanded Core component of the curriculum with the parents. Both activities highlight how some challenges of living with blindness or low vision are met with success.
- 2:20-3:20 *O & M Instructional Session and Expanded Core Session:* (sessions are a repeat from 1:15)
Participants will pick the session they did not do at 1:15.
- 3:30-4:30 *Parent Groups:* Will be a separate group for Mom's and a separate group for Dad's. This has been one of the weekend's favorite sessions.
- 4:30-5:30 *Open Swim:* for the families to join with their children in the gym OR just some down time prior to dinner. All children will be with their families until children's program begins at 7:00 PM.
- 5:30-6:45 *BBQ:* in the main dining room
- 7:00-9:00 *Parent Panel:* this has also be a favorite of the weekend. Listen to parents as they share their story about their journey with their child. It is uplifting and empowering to be a part of this presentation (as a participant or a member of the audience).
- 7:00-9:00 The kids will be in the cottages watching movies or playing outside (weather permitting). When the parent panel is over please pick up your kids from the cottages.

Sunday, June 21, 2015

- 7:45-8:45 Breakfast
- 9:00-9:45 *Successful Adult Presentation: Tabatha Soliz* will speak (topic being determined at press time)
- 9:45-10:00 Break
- 10:00-11:30 *MonTech: Cheryl Belitsky:* from Helena will come and speak on Transition, Overview of Services, Latest Technologies, and then discussion Q and A which will include a product display as a show and tell. This session will also cover accessibility on mobile devices.
- 11:30 *Sibling Summary:* Listen to what you children have to say about having a blind or visually impaired sibling AND also what the blind or visually impaired kids think about living in a sighted family! Some surprises and thought provoking information for all parents.
- 12:00 Lunch in the dining room and then families depart



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WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID ABOUT MSDB's FAMILY LEARNING WEEKENDS!

"I learned something new every day - even after attending five previous family weekends."

"Coming to MSDB for the Family Learning Weekend is our favorite thing to do every year"

"I was very impressed with MSDB in general. I had no idea that this was such a 'gem'. Montana is very lucky."

"This weekend is worth every mile I drive. MSDB has given our family emotional, physical and a valuable education"

"It was great! A lot of wonderful connections have been made"

"The staff is absolutely incredible."

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